Shrinathji’s Swaroop & Significance

Shrinathji’s Swaroop rivets the mind soothes the soul and arouses the bhaav of ‘Ananda’ within us. Every small nuance of the Swaroop has a symbolic meaning. We just need to interpret these meanings and apply them in our lives. (Swaroop means idol. Bhaav means emotion. ‘Ananda’ means bliss.)

We wait outside the temple of Nathdwara patiently along with a thousand other devotees to get a glimpse of Shrinathji (darshan) for a few fleeting minutes. We can learn many things even in this brief span of time…

The different names of Shrinathji

Shrinathji is a form of Krishna. He is known as “Goverdhannathji”, “Dev daman” and “Nag daman” too. He resides atop the hill of Goverdhan so he is called Goverdhan – Nath Ji. “Daman” means to overpower in Sanskrit. He overpowered Indra by lifting the hill of Goverdhan on his little finger so he is known as “Dev daman”. The word “Nag” can mean snake and elephant too in Sanskrit. Krishna overpowered Kaliya the snake and Kuvalyapida, Kamsa’s elephant, so he is known as “Nag daman”.

Shrinathji represents Krishna as a 7-year-old lad. But the Vrajvasis fondly address him as “Shreeji Bawa” because he looks like a friendly father figure to them.

It is said that Shrinathji stands below the hill of Goverdhan. This is believed to the threshold of the doorway that leads us directly to Goloka, Krishna’s realm.

Shrinathji’s Swaroop

The Swaroop of Shrinathji is jet black in colour. It is approximately four feet high. His right hand is closed in a fist and rests on his waist. But his thumb sticks out. His left hand is cupped and raised upwards. It touches the arched Peethika around him. Both his feet are straight and touch the ground. His eyes are half-closed, downcast. His hair is tied up in a top-knot. He wears a garland of fresh flowers and holds a few stalks of lotuses in the crook of his right arm.

Shrinathji’s left arm

The left arm of Shrinathji is cupped and raised upwards. It touches the oblong arch of the Peethika.

Significance

Krishna had lifted the entire hill of Goverdhan on the little finger of his left hand to protect the people of Vrindavan from Indra’s wrath. So his devotees say, “He now carries the weight of all our fears, anxieties and worries with his left hand and asks us to seek refuge under his divinity. We feel safe because we know Krishna will always take care of all our problems.”

Shrinathji’s right hand

Shrinathji’s right-hand rests on his waist and is closed in a fist but his thumb sticks out.

Significance

His devotees say, “Shrinathji’s stance gives us the confidence to face our challenges. He says, “Look at my closed fist. Everything is always in my hands. Look at my thumb sticking out. My will prevails always. Why do you fear so much? Whom are you scared of? I am with you at all times. Just surrender and let go of everything!”

Shrinathji’s legs

Shrinathji’s feet are straight and rest firmly on the ground, unlike Krishna's Tribhangi flute holding posture where his body is bent at the neck, waist and knee!

Significance

The left side of the body is usually associated with the heart and represents the female materialistic form where “bhoga” (pleasure) is the priority. The right side is associated with the mind and represents the male spiritual form where “yoga” (devotion) is prime. The male and the female form merge to form a composite whole. This stance of Shrinathji symbolizes equanimity. He balances yoga with bhoga, pleasure with devotion, and the spiritual and material aspects of his life with aplomb!

His devotees say, “We cannot pursue God when we are hungry. And we are always hungry for several things. In satiating our many hungers we tend to forget or ignore God altogether. We understand that both materialistic needs and spiritual pursuits are equally important in life when we get Shrinathji’s darshan. Shrinathji’s stance gives us the courage to strike this balance!”

Shrinathji’s eyes

Shrinathji’s eyes are half-closed unlike the eyes of other idols where the eyes are wide open. His downcast eyes look towards his feet.

Significance

His devotees are confident when they say, “Shrinathji’s gaze is full of empathy. He knows we have erred. He knows we are struggling to cope with our challenges. He acknowledges our mistakes and accepts us despite them. We are able to accept our flaws easily in front of him because we know he will forgive us. We are able to surrender to his will because we have faith in him and know he will take care of everything for us!”

Shrinathji’s hair and face

Unlike Krishna who wears his hair loose, Shrinathji’s hair is coiled in a top knot. Shrinathji always has an enigmatic half-smile on his face.

His devotees say, “Shrinathji asks us to focus on self-control and poise. If we have faith in him and his unique ways we will learn to control ourselves at all times. His half-smile makes us question our faith and ourselves too. We learn to shed our ego and introspect.”

Lotus stalks and garlands of fresh flowers

Shrinathji loves to adorn himself with garlands of fresh flowers. He holds a few stalks of lotuses in the crook of his right arm.

His devotees say, “The garlands of fresh flowers symbolize ‘Yoga Maya’. Maya is an illusionary power of

God. The flowers are fragrant, light, tender and beautiful. But they wither within a day."

"Happiness, pleasure etc. is fleeting. It is a part of Maya and his Leela. Like the garlands of flowers, it will pale into insignificance after a while. We can overcome Maya with Yoga: illusion with devotion. Yoga helps us understand Maya."

"Look at the lotuses that are offered to him closely. Sometimes lotus buds are offered to him. At other times fully bloomed lotuses are placed in the crook of his right arm. Why is Shrinathji so fond of lotuses? A lotus symbolizes detachment. Like the lotus buds, we have to slowly detach ourselves from our external situations. Fully bloomed lotuses symbolize self-realization. When we delve inwards we realize that God resides within us too."

The darshan closes. We realize that we had been oblivious to the jostling swelling crowd of people around us. We move out quietly along with a thousand others. We feel at peace within. That suffices for now. We are willing to shed our ego, see through the barriers of our flawed perceptions, empathize and make amends with our loved ones…….at least for a brief while….

- Shrinathji’s shringar (garments and ornaments), bhaav and the ambience around his Swaroop keep changing all through the day every day. Shrinathji sends us myriad messages through all these aspects too. Let’s look more closely at such things when we do his darshan the next time. We will surely find whatever we are looking for.
- “Charan Chowkis” of Shrinathji: “Charan Chowki" means footstool. Shrinathji resided in 10 different places during his Rath Yatra. The Havelis in these places are called “Charan Chowkis” because this is where Shrinathji rested his feet. They are: In his first temple atop the hill of Goverdhan, Mathura, during his visit to Girdharji’s and Gusainji’s house, Agra, his first halt in his Rath Yatra, Krishnapuri near Dandoti Ghat, KrishnaVilaspur near Kota, Kishangarh, Champasena, Udaipur, Ghasiad and Nathdwara.